

September 12, 2011

Councilmember Zachary M. Klein
90 W. Broad Street
Second Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Councilmember Klein,

The Columbus Public Health Healthy Places program has a mission to increase healthy and active living by establishing development policies and practices to reduce negative health impacts and by creating places that foster physical activity as a part of everyday life. Design guidelines are a key component to ensuring the future built environment includes active living features through pedestrian and bicycle amenities, infrastructure and design.

This letter is to express Columbus Public Health's support for the Short North Design Guidelines. The guidelines are tentatively scheduled for a second reading on September 19, 2011. The Healthy Places program has reviewed the guidelines and found several positive and innovative design principles, guidelines and strategies that support a built environment for safe active living.

Active living is important to Columbus Public Health for a number of reasons. First, there is an increase in obesity and chronic diseases- both of which can be reduced or prevented with physical activity. Second, an active living lifestyle means people are driving their cars less. This improves air quality which is good for everyone, but especially for those with respiratory diseases. In addition, as we improve infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists we make the built environment safer and therefore reduce injuries and fatalities. Finally, while we want everyone to adopt an active living lifestyle by choice, for some there is not an option. Improvements to make it easier to walk, bike and use public transportation also make it easier and safer for those residents who do not have access to a car.

Columbus Public Health's Community Health Risk Assessment Indicators show that 51.2% of adults living in and around the Short North are obese or overweight and 1.9% have diabetes. The prevalence is lower than Franklin County which is 59.1% and 7.3% respectively. The asthma prevalence for the area is 6.4% for adults, which is also slightly lower than Franklin County (8.0%). Additionally, 53% adults living in and around the Short North meet the recommended amount of exercise (30 minutes a day on five or more days of the week). The Short North Design Guidelines contribute to improving public health by preserving and enhancing a built environment that fosters physical activity. The ability to be physically active in your neighborhood (or in neighborhoods you visit) reduces the need for a car and increases physical activity. Examples of this found in the guidelines include:

240 Parsons Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43215-5331

Teresa C. Long, MD, MPH
Health Commissioner

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- The Short North will benefit from a true mix of land uses, organized vertically within buildings and horizontally throughout the district that provides a clear and seamless development linkage with Downtown and the University District. Mixed use development encourages walking and biking to daily destinations.
- The pedestrian experience should have a major influence on the design and building pattern within the Short North and provision should be made to accommodate pedestrians, as well as bicyclists and transit riders wherever feasible and appropriate. This establishes a policy and guiding precedent that other Columbus neighborhoods can model – thereby increasing the use of design that is “active”, city-wide.
- Parking should always be secondary to and supportive of buildings. Appropriately integrated parking garages are preferred. This encourages residents and visitors to park once and walk throughout the district, increasing physical activity in daily life (including in leisure).
- Residential uses should provide parking at a rate that responds realistically to demand and site context. Parking reductions encourage active transportation and the use of transit.
- Physical space for the interaction of people, such as plazas, enhanced entries and outdoor dining, should be integrated into project design. Public space encourages social gathering, which in turn fosters an active lifestyle.
- The overall design of the streetscape and its individual elements will promote a high quality, safe and walkable public realm. Improving pedestrian safety is critical in encouraging our citizen to walk to daily destinations.
- Well-placed public art should be encouraged as a means to build on the district’s focus as a center for creativity. Aesthetically pleasing places with features that bring people together, such as public art, are perceived as being safer, encourage social interaction and are therefore more walkable.

Moreover, it is important to note that the Short North neighborhood had a large public input component. The fact that residents of the Short North neighborhood asked for these active living principles shows our community is ready and waiting for improved infrastructure and development that supports pedestrian and cyclists activity.

I look forward to seeing these guidelines adopted and implemented, further making Columbus even more of an active, vibrant city.

Sincerely,



Betsy A. Pandora, MCRP
Healthy Places Coordinator

cc: Dr. Teresa Long, Health Commissioner, Columbus Public Health
Vince Papsidero, Administrator, Planning Division, Department of Development
Hearcel F. Craig, Health, Housing & Human Services Chair, Columbus City Council